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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 DHA-02 SCCT-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04
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FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4408

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)
U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS
Margaret P. Grafeld, Director
() Release () Excise () Deny

[REDACTED] BUENOS AIRES 0823

Exemption(s):
Declassify: () In Part (X) In Full **DECLONTRAL**
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Date Declassify on Reason

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, AR

SUBJECT: FORMER TRIPLE A MEMBER TALKING TO CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEE

1. THE SPECIAL CONGRESSIONAL INVESTIGATING COMMITTEE LOOKING INTO ALLEGED IRREGULARITIES AT THE SOCIAL WELFARE MINISTRY HAS COME ACROSS A SELF-PROCLAIMED FORMER MEMBER OF THE AAA COUNTER-TERRORIST ORGANIZATION WHO IS WILLING TO TALK. THE WITNESS, A FORMER ARMY LT., HECTOR PAINO, WHO IS BEING DETAINED ON A CRIMINAL CHARGE UNRELATED TO TERRORIST ACTS, HAS BEGUN TO SUPPLY COMMITTEE MEMBERS WITH INFORMATION ON THE ORGANIZATION AND OPERATION OF THE TRIPLE A.

2. ACCORDING TO PAINO, WHOSE TESTIMONY IS REACHING THE PRESS VIA COMMITTEE LEAKS, HE WAS HIRED BY SOCIAL WELFARE MINISTRY IN 1973. AT TIME OF THIS APPOINTMENT PAINO CLAIMS THAT THEN MINISTRY PRESS SPOKESMAN JORGE CONTI, A CLOSE ASSOCIATE OF LOPEZ REGA, ORDERED HIM TO "BEGIN SETTING UP A DYNAMIC SECURITY ORGANIZATION." SHORTLY THEREAFTER, PAINO BEGAN RECEIVING INSTRUCTIONS DIRECTLY FROM TWO NOW DEPARTED MINISTERS-- ROBALLOS AND LOPEZ REGA.

3. PAINO REPORTEDLY TOLD THE CONGRESSMEN THAT HE LEFT TRIPLE A AT TIME HE HAD BEEN ASKED TO ORGANIZE AND PARTICIPATE IN THE EXECUTION OF LEFTIST PERONIST CONGRESSMAN ORTEGA PENA, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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BUT FROM HIS SUPPOSEDLY PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE OF ORGANIZATION TO THAT DATE HE TOLD CONGRESSMEN THAT MOST OF FUNDS FOR EQUIPMENT AND MANPOWER USED BY TRIPLE A HAD COME FROM SOCIAL WELFARE FUNDS, MUCH OF IT DISGUISED IN FALSE CONTRACTS FOR CONSTRUCTION AND PURCHASES OF LEGITIMATE ITEMS. AMONG CHARGES PAINO MAKES, HE CLAIMS THAT WELFARE FUNDS WERE USED TO PURCHASE 12 BOXES OF MACHINEGUNS FROM A FOREIGN SOURCE, AND THAT DURING HIS TENURE MANY PROMINENT POLITICAL FIGURES WHO WERE NOT ASSASSINATED WERE TARGETS OF TRIPLE A, INCLUDING THEN PRIVATE SECRETARY TO THE PRESIDENT, COL. DAMASCO, WHO LATER BECAME INTERIOR MINISTER.

4. PAINO'S TESTIMONY WAS TAPE RECORDED AT PRISON BY CONGRESSMEN WHO INTERVIEWED HIM. THE CONGRESSMEN HAVE PUBLICLY TOLD NEWSMEN THAT THEY WILL BE RETURNING FOR FURTHER INTERVIEWS WITH PAINO SHORTLY AND HAVE ORDERED PRISON OFFICIALS TO PROVIDE HIM WITH MAXIMUM PROTECTION.

5. COMMENT: AS NOTED IN TODAY'S ISSUE OF LA OPINION, BEFORE COMMITTEE CONTINUES WITH ITS QUESTIONING OF PAINO IT MUST COME TO GRIPS WITH COMPLEX LEGAL QUESTIONS AND EXPLOSIVE POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF CASE. FROM LEGAL STANDPOINT, COMMITTEE CHARTER DIRECTS IT TO LOOK INTO ALL IRREGULARITIES AT SOCIAL WELFARE MINISTRY. AT TIME COMMITTEE FOUNDED, THESE IRREGULARITIES WERE ALL ASSUMED TO BE FISCAL IN NATURE. WHETHER OR NOT COMMITTEE CAN USE PAINO'S CHARGE THAT MURDERS WERE PAID FOR OUT OF WELFARE FUNDS TO EXTEND ITS LEGISLATIVE MANDATE MAY REQUIRE CONSULTATION WITH FULL LOWER CHAMBER. ON STRICTLY POLITICAL SIDE IT DOUBTFUL THAT MRS. PERON AND HER ENTOURAGE WILL ALLOW INVESTIGATION WHICH IS POTENTIALLY VERY DAMAGING TO HER POLITICALLY TO GO FORWARD WITHOUT FIERCE STRUGGLE. IT IS POSSIBLE, HOWEVER, THAT COMMITTEE WILL ALSO FACE PRESSURE FROM SENIOR ARMY GENERALS, POSSIBLY INCLUDING GENERAL HARGUINDEGUY, NOW CHIEF OF POLICE, TO PURSUE PAINO'S LEADS TO THEIR ULTIMATE DESTINATION, AS IT WOULD SERVE ARMY PURPOSE OF FURTHER DISCREDITING NOT ONLY MRS. PERON BUT MANY OF HER CLOSES PRESENT AND FORMER ASSOCIATES.
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